

Exercise: Interpretation Deep Dive

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION: Upon being caught up in the consequences of a values-based or ethical scandal, leaders often exclaim surprise at how they, along with others, come to find themselves in their predicament. While many continue to proclaim innocence in the face of overwhelming evidence, some eventually come to terms with the causal factors and personal decisions that contributed to their or others' demise. This interpretative exercise challenges you to proactively take a deep dive into your present persona and the ways it affects others professionally and personally.

EXAMPLE: Chuck Colson engineered the Watergate break-in that resulted in President Richard Nixon resigning from office. Colson delivered an address on ethics years later to Harvard Business School students on the incident and his reflections prior to and following the incident. He reported feeling absolutely convinced that he was pursuing the common good beforehand, but realized afterwards the tremendous impact of self-deception and self-rationalization.

INSTRUCTIONS: Think of a character-related behavior, good or bad, you exhibit on duty and want to better manage, leverage, or understand. Next, respond to the following questions.

Describe the overt character-related behavior you exhibit while on duty that you want to better manage, leverage, or understand.

Does this behavior tend to make itself known or happen under certain circumstances or in certain situations? If so, describe the situation or circumstances.

What indicators tend to happen or make themselves known to you in advance of this behavior?

Besides you, who is aware of this particular behavioral tendency and its warning signs or indicators? Could you discuss this tendency with this person and work with them to improve it?

Does this behavior tend to be directed or targeted toward any person(s) or types of individuals in particular? If so, what individual or type of individual tends to be on the receiving end of this behavior?

What type of reactions and responses does this behavior elicit in people who experience it?

What are the outcomes and potential misinterpretations and consequences of this behavior (both positive and negative)?

What is your explanation for why you exhibit this behavior? Put another way, what is at the root cause of this behavior?